

Preliminary Reconnaissance of Threatened
Archaeological Resources in the Lower
Poudre Canyon, Larimer County,
Colorado

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OFFICE OF THE
STATE ARCHAEOLOGIST

Plains
Foothills
Mtns
Front Range

NOT MAPPED

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Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest
Land Use Planning Office

April 1978

Prepared for

Office of the State Archaeologist of Colorado
and U.S. Forest Service

Introduction

The canyon of the Cache la Poudre begins along the North American Continental Divide near Cameron Pass and follows a general eastward trend until the river enters the Poudre River Valley near Laporte, Colorado. Major tributaries of the river include Beaver Creek, South and North Forks of the Cache la Poudre, Elkhorn Creek, Joe Wright Creek, and Gordon Creek. The river flows through a greater portion of the Colorado Rocky Mountains including the Mummy Range and the Medicine Bow Range, and the Colorado Front Range and Colorado Foothills. Major biotic life zones including Alpine, Sub-alpine, Tundra, Mountain and foothills are transversed by the canyon.

Since January 1976 the author has engaged in systematic nondestructive reconnaissance of archaeological remains in the Cache la Poudre Canyon.

Sites described in the following text were recorded by the author between June 1977 and April 1978 during the course of on-going independent research, the Poudre Canyon Archaeological Survey.

All the sites discussed in this report are located within the boundaries of Roosevelt National Forest in the Poudre and Redfeather Ranger Districts.

These sites have been altered, to varying extents, by resource erosion, construction activity, collector vandalization or some combination of those events.

Many of these sites are apparently being continually vandalized and/or are currently being modified by natural processes. One of this study's major objectives is to document the sites before further alteration or destruction occurs.

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Abstract

Preliminary non-destructive archaeological survey within the Cache la Poudre Canyon, Larimer County, Colorado, has identified six site locations which require immediate resource evaluation.

Artifact inventories from 5LR532 and 5LR536 suggest Late Pre-historic cultural affiliation, while diagnostic material from 5LR550 seems to indicate a Late Preceramic occupation.

5LR533, 5LR534 and 5LR535 lack sufficient quantities of cultural material to permit speculation concerning possible cultural affiliation.

Method of Investigation

With the exception of 5LR550, which was discovered by chance during a Forest Service construction project, the sites described in this report were located during investigation of selected sample areas. Controlled sampling of land forms representative of various aspects of the local terrain is currently being carried out by the author in an effort to recover data concerning site and artifact distribution frequency in the Poudre Canyon area.

Sites containing significant amounts of cultural debris are usually mapped with compass and tape, or, time and resources permitting, with transit and stadia rod.

Planimetric maps of sites 5LR534 and 5LR535, not included among the illustrations in this report, may be made available to concerned parties upon request.

5LR533, 5LR536 and 5LR550 have not been mapped.

Diagnostic artifacts illustrated in Figure 3 were drawn in the field with the aid of a Claire Vu. (While the Claire Vu device generally facilitates very accurate reproductions, because of the conditions under which the original drawings were made, some of the artifacts illustrated in Figure 3 may be slightly distorted or out of scale.)

No artifactual material has been removed or dislocated during investigation of federally owned sites.

5LR532

T. 9 N., R. 72 W., Section 34

Big Narrows Quadrangle

7.5' 1962

UTM: zone 13

567100 mE; 4503400 mN

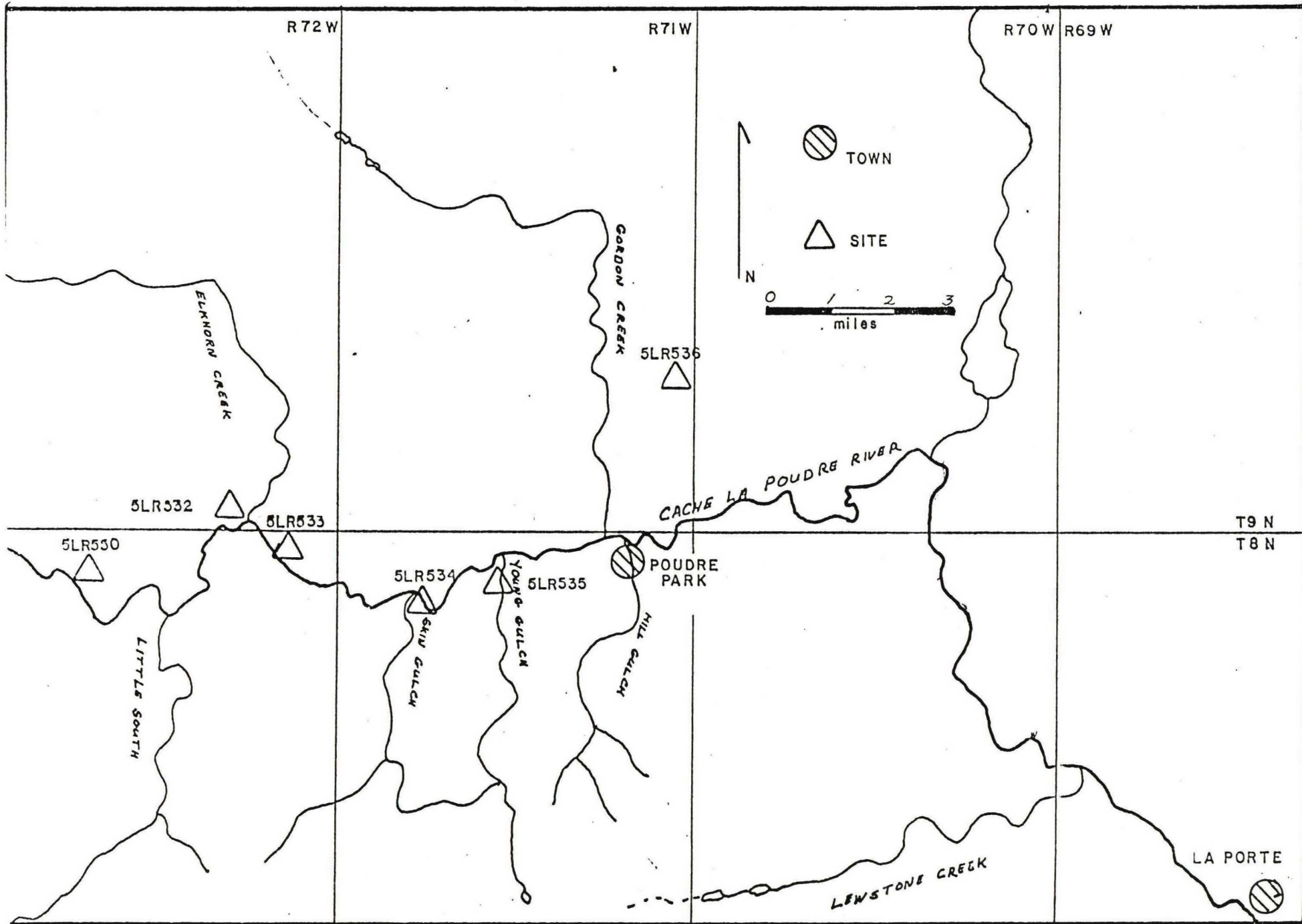


Description

Aboriginal occupation of a second-level terrace near the confluence of Elkhorn Creek and the Cache la Poudre River is evidenced by extensive lithic scatters and recently exposed sub-surface features along the west side of Elkhorn Creek.

Terraces extend west from Elkhorn Creek about one half kilometer along the north bank of the Poudre River in two well-defined levels. State Highway 14 transects the terraces along the east-west axis; most of the area south of Highway 14 has been graded for use as a campground and picnic area.

Concentrations of cultural material begin at the north edge of Highway 14 and extend north about 50 meters along the edge of a steep embankment rising approximately 6 meters above the west edge of Elkhorn Creek. About 15 meters west of the embankment, cultural material begins to thin out noticeably, but isolated flakes and occasional tool fragments



moderately weathered and it is impossible to discern if either has been ground. Both ends appear battered, but this may be due to natural abrasion.

Two small pottery sherds are present near the north shoulder of Highway 14 inside the site's southern boundary. Both sherds are heavily tempered with sand and gravel. Exteriors are dull orange and extremely smooth, having a slipped appearance. Interior surfaces are deep black and rough. A light black solid triangle on the exterior surface of one sherd may be the remains of a geometric decoration or simply a fortuitous discoloration.

Features

Approximately 22 meters north of Highway 14 along the face of the embankment is a partially exposed concentration of fire-cracked stones, charcoal and burned faunal remains. This feature and a similar one a few meters north are tentatively labeled hearths.

The exposed area of hearth A (plate 1) measures about one-half meter in width. The ash lens (if there was any) appears to have been depleted by erosion and intermixed with the dark topsoil making it impossible to determine the vertical extent and configuration of the feature.

Six meters north of hearth A, a similar feature is situated near the edge of the embankment (plate 2). This feature, not as heavily eroded as hearth A, appears relatively intact beneath a thin layer of soil. Its presence is indicated by numerous protrusions of discolored, (heat-cracked ?) stones. Traces of the feature are vaguely discernible along the surface of the terrace proper. The entire feature appears quite large and may represent more than one hearth.

continue to occur at least another 50 meters in that direction. Isolated material has been observed as far as 150 meters north of the main site area.

Material Culture

Surface material consists primarily of lithic detritus. Twelve tools or tool fragments have been observed on the site.

The most prominent tool fragments are midsections of thin symmetrical triangular projectile points or knives (Figure 3d). Three specimens of this type are present, all manufactured from crypto crystalline stone and exhibiting medium fine pressure flaking. Flake scars run perpendicular to the blade long axis, often forming distinct lateral ridges.

One intact projectile point is present (Figure 3a), a small corner-notched point with a broad, sharp triangular blade and expanding convex base. The point exhibits pressure flaking and lightly ground edges.

The lower half of a large unnotched blade (Figure 3b) may represent a second projectile point type or a stage in projectile point manufacture. Blade edges are symmetrical and the slightly expanded base is concave.

The upper half of a large leaf-shaped quartzite biface (Figure 3c) displays percussion flaking with one surface worked only along the edges.

One bifacially ground sandstone slab metate is represented by three fragments just off the north shoulder of Highway 14 at the site's southern perimeter. A fourth sandstone fragment a few centimeters away apparently represents a second metate, bifacially ground with one surface pecked.

A questionable mano and/or hammer stone has been observed on the site. The specimen is a large granitic river cobble. Both surfaces are

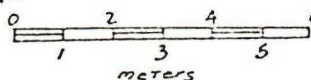
5LR532

- △ FLAKED STONE
- GROUND STONE
- CERAMICS

▨ EXPOSED FEATURE

☁ DECIDUOUS TREE OR SHRUB

✱ CONIFEROUS TREE



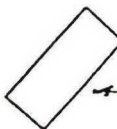
MIN

△

ACCESS ROAD

HEAVIEST CONCENTRATION OF FLAKES

ELMHORN CREEK



CONCRETE STRUCTURE

DATUM - BRASS CAP EL. 6501

COLO HIGHWAY 14 W

Conclusion

Projectile point and ceramic types observed at 5LR532 are characteristic of the late Prehistoric Period in the Colorado Front Range (Morris, 1976). The nature and extent of material culture at Elkhorn Creek seems to suggest a rather intense occupation over an appreciable length of time.

5LR533

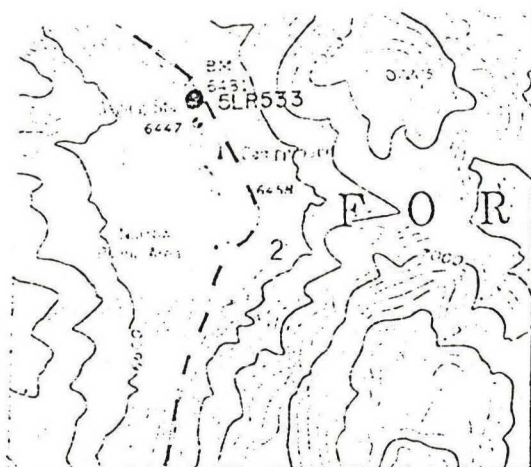
T. 8 N., R. 72 W., Section 2

Big Narrows Quadrangle

7.5' 1962

UTM: zone 13

458000 mE; 4504600 mN



Description

5LR533 occupies a low flood terrace at the extreme west end of the Narrows Picnic Area, about 1 kilometer east of 5LR532.

The terrace is bounded on the north by a vertical rock face about 6 meters high with two small overhangs nears its east and west ends.

Colorado Highway 14 lies about 20 meters north of the rock face.

Lacking a distinct scarp along its south edge, the terrace merges gradually with the underlying river channel.

Material Culture

A few widely scattered flakes are present along the terrace's south edge near the Poudre River's high water mark.

One piece of a broken biface or scraper (Figure 3f) is present near the rock face about mid-way between the two overhangs.

A broken quartzite drill or perforator (Figure 3e) lies just outside the west overhang. Both artifacts are probably too fragmentary to be diagnostic.

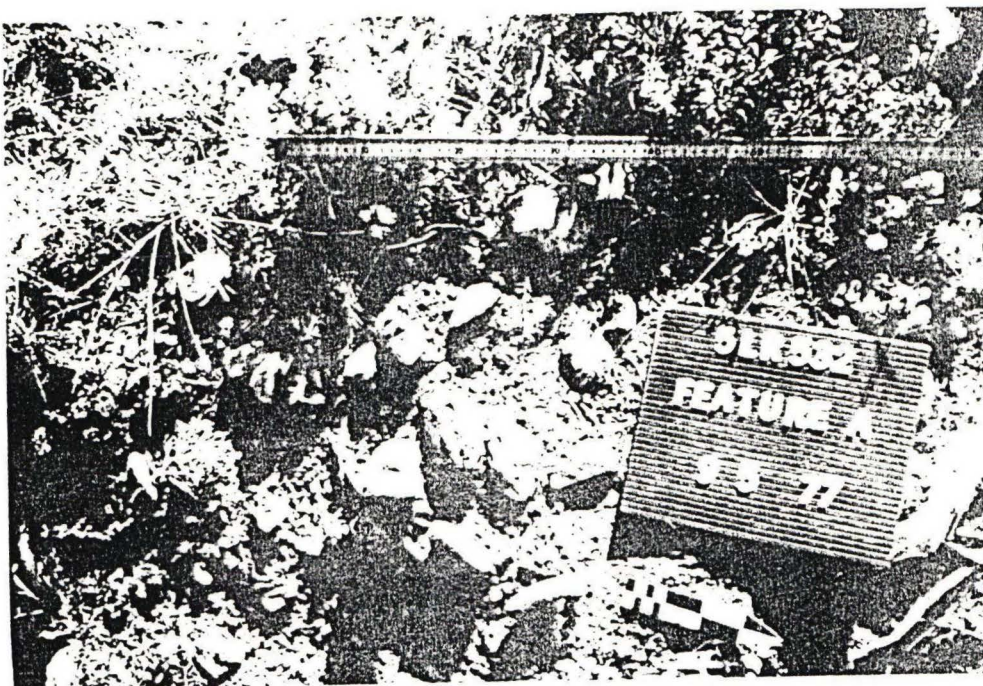


Plate 1, Feature A 5LR532



Plate 2, Feature B 5LR532

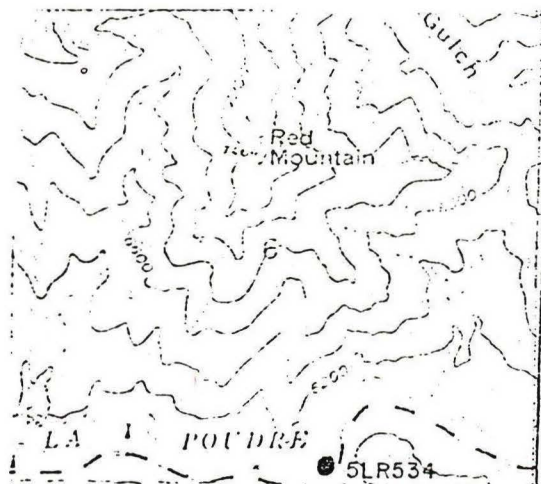
T. 8 N., R. 21 W., Section 6

Big Narrows Quadrangle

7.5' 1962

UTM: zone 13

567100 mE; 4503400 mN



Description

Directly north of the Stove Prairie Landing (where Stove Prairie Road intersects Highway 14) Skin Gulch empties into the Cache la Poudre River. A low confluence extending east from the Gulch along the south bank of the river contains some evidence of aboriginal occupation.

Arbitrary site boundaries are defined by a high, steep embankment dropping from the north side of Highway 14 along the south and east edges of the Skin Gulch confluence and the Skin Gulch Drainage to the west. Along the northern edge of the confluence a steep embankment about two meters high at the west end of the confluence and decreasing in elevation towards the east, forms the southern boundary of the Cache la Poudre River.

Feature/Material Culture

About six meters east of the point where Skin Gulch forks with the Cache la Poudre is a large squaw brush shrub (*Rhus Trilobata*) at the edge of the north embankment. Directly below the bush is a layer of ash, charcoal, heat-discolored rocks and burned, fragmented bones exposed

Because of the site's low elevation, it is possible that all of the archaeological material was deposited by flood waters.

However, the shelter afforded by the rock face and small overhangs may increase the likelihood of aboriginal occupation.

The area beneath the small overhangs is too congested with remains of recent campfires to be examined for archaeological material. It seems likely though, that if the area was utilized by aboriginal groups, there may be activity loci associated with the shelters.

Conclusion

The Narrows Campground is a popular recreational area during the summer months. 5LR533 has probably been casually collected by persons using the campground and picnic facilities. The site will probably continue to be collected as long as archaeological material is visible.

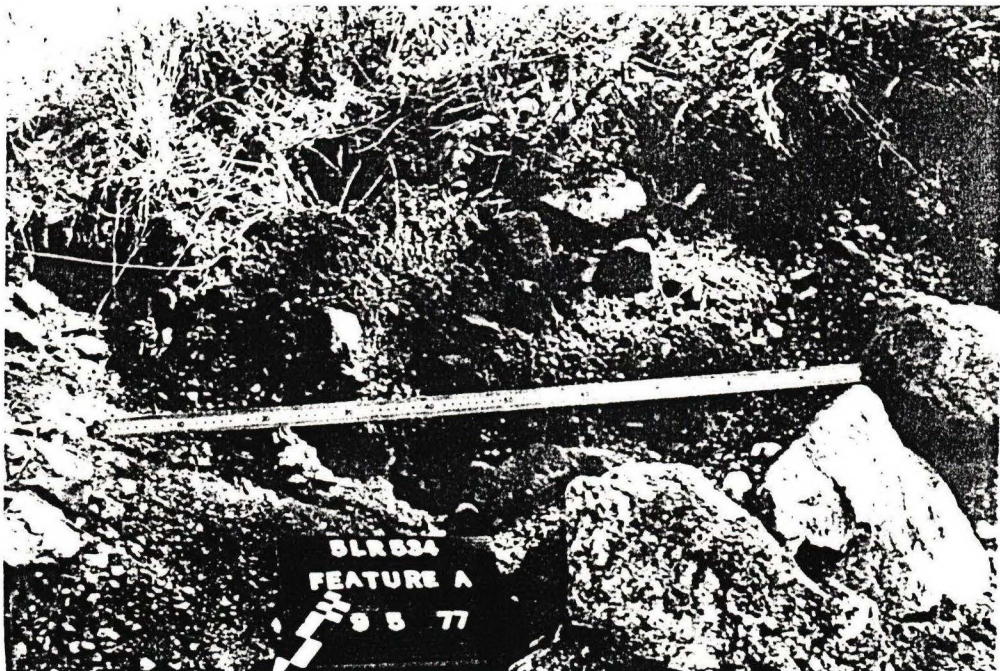


Plate 3, Feature A 5LR534

at the face of the embankment. The deposit forms a roughly symmetrical plano-convex lens, its upper edge lying about 7 cm. below present surface and measuring slightly less than 1.25 meters width (plate 3).

The feature appears to have originated as a bowl-shaped depression dug through a shallow sand-loam topsoil into underlying river gravel deposits to a depth of about 30 cm. While numerous discolored, fire-cracked rocks are present throughout the ash lens, the basin does not appear to have been lined with stones prior to use.

A few cryptocrystalline and quartzite flakes are scattered through the ash lens, but no diagnostic material is visible.

An investigation of the overlying terrace discovered two small flakes about 1 meter south-east of the feature.

Conclusion

The ash lens appears to be weathering rather quickly. Bits of charcoal scattered along the gravel face of the embankment may indicate active loss of material.

Because of its location on the convex bank of a small meander loop, the site is especially vulnerable to bank scouring and undercutting by river currents.

striations are visible on the ground surfaces, running perpendicular to the stone's long axis.

Immediately west of the mano is a very small utilized chalcedony flake.

The only potentially diagnostic tool on the site is a small unfinished (?) projectile point (Figure 3g).

The tool is at the east edge of the access road, 11.6 meters southeast of the west corner post of the steel gate.

The artifact is roughly flaked from coarse-grained grey quartzite. The blade is slightly sub-triangular with a very sharp tip. The tool appears to have been partially notched on one side, but the indentation and accompanying flake scar are too poorly defined to be certain. The blade is bi-convex and rather thick in cross-section; the base is slightly convex.

Flakes and questionable faunal material have been observed along the scarp of an eroded embankment on the south side of the Young Gulch drainage (plate 4) about 100 m. south of the steel gate.

Along a hillside west of the access road, a few scattered flakes are present between the gate and the Young Gulch Drainage.

Conclusion

Most of the material culture at 5LR535 was probably destroyed during construction of the parking lot. However, a few peripheral activity loci may still be intact. It seems reasonable to assume the area may have hosted a large and intense occupation, extending through the State Highway right-of-way into other portions of the Ansel Watrous Campground.

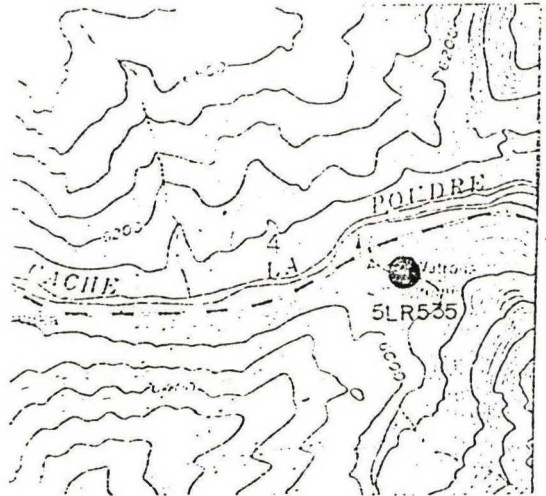
T. 8 N., R. 71 W., Section 4

Poudre Park Quadrangle

7.5' 1962

UTM: zone 13

4504900 mN; 479400 mE



Description

The Ansel Watrous Campground is located on the north side of Highway 14 about 20 kilometers west of the mouth of Poudre Canyon. A portion of the campground facilities extend south across Highway 14 where a large area at the mouth of Young Gulch has been cleared and graded to serve as a parking area (plate 4).

Immediately south of the parking area, on and alongside a four-wheel drive road, are a few scattered artifacts.

Material Culture

The most intense concentration of material culture extends from an iron gate at the head of the four-wheel drive road south about 10 meters along the road. No more than ten cryptocrystalline and quartzite flakes are visible along the west edge of the road. Three meters south of the gate on the center of the road is a broken bifacially ground ovoid granite mano. The tool is heavily ground on both surfaces and shallow

5LR536

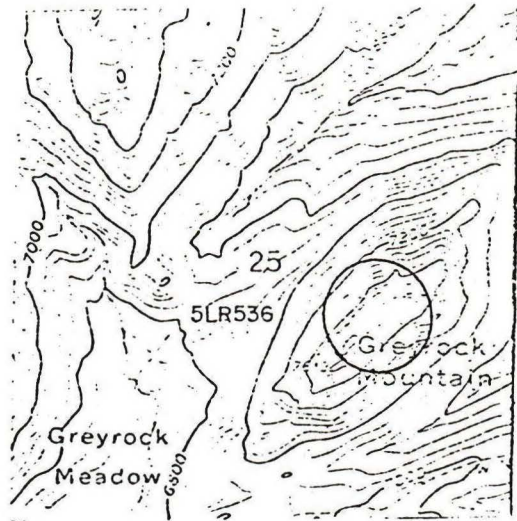
T. 9 N., R. 71 W., Section 25

Poudre Park Quadrangle

7.5' 1962

UTM: zone 13

475475 mE; 4507100 mN



Description

Rising to an elevation of 7,613 feet (2,518.4 meters), Grey Rock Mountain's sheer granite dome is a conspicuous, visually impressive high point in the foothills terrain of the Lower Poudre Canyon.

Just below its summit the dome encloses a broad strip of tiered terraces measuring about 200 meters north to south and 70 meters east to west.

Encircled by high granite walls, the area offers excellent shelter from the prevailing winds. At the southwest tip of the site is a small perennial lake.

Material Culture

At the time of recording, lithic scatters, consisting almost entirely of flaking debitage, were fairly dense in many areas of the site.

Two diagnostic artifacts have been observed on the site, a small corner-notched projectile point and a scraper.

Manufactured from white chert, the projectile point (Figure 3h) exhibits shallow diagonal notches and a blunt, broad blade that is

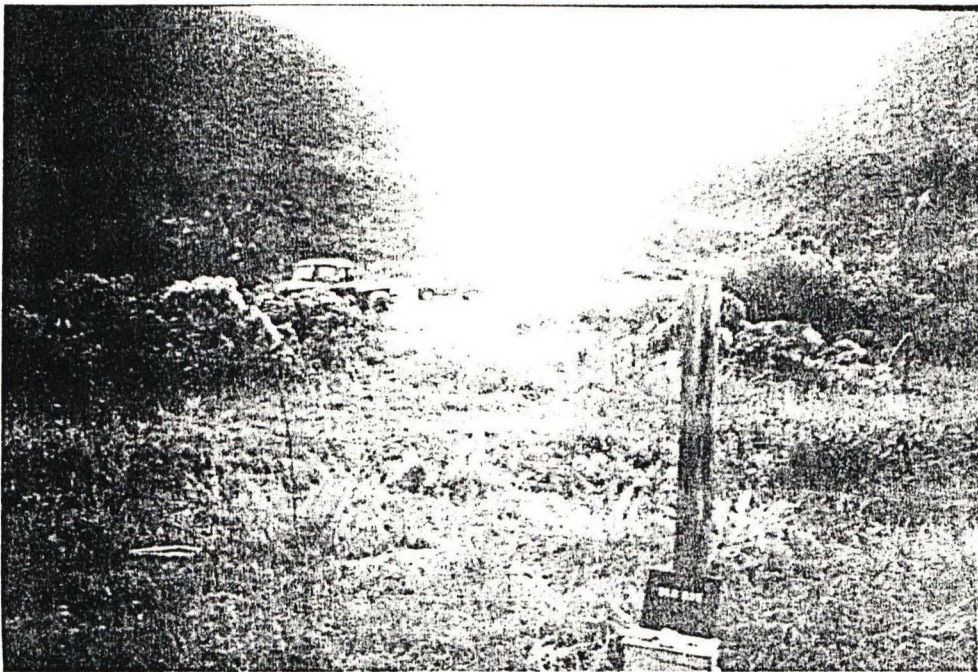


Plate 4, Graded area 5LR535
(Trowel indicates north)

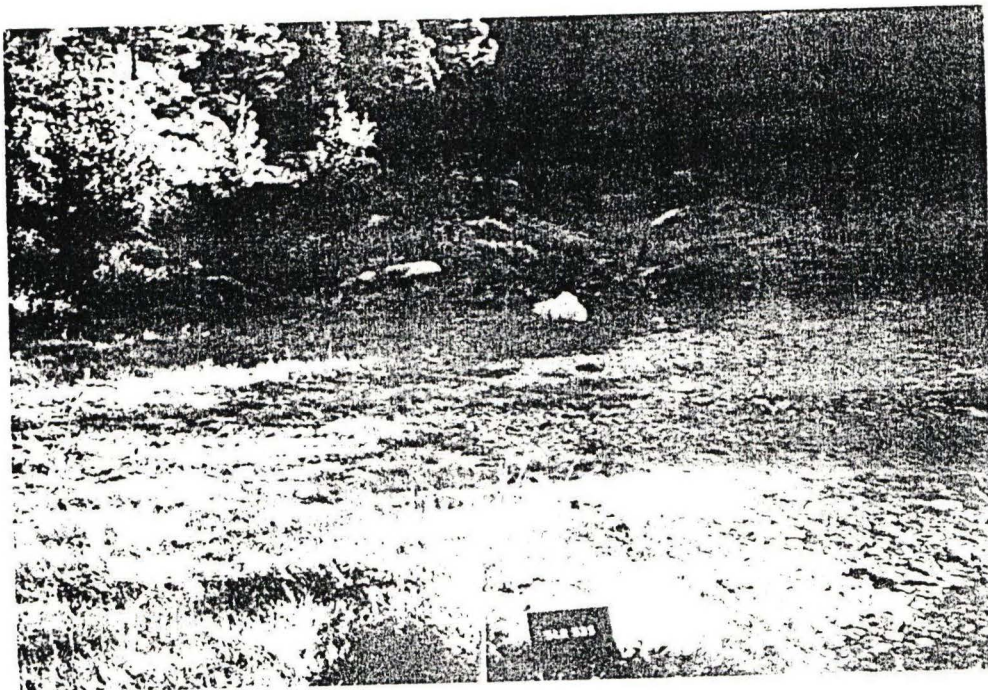


Plate 5, Access road 5LR535
(Trowel indicates north)

5LR550

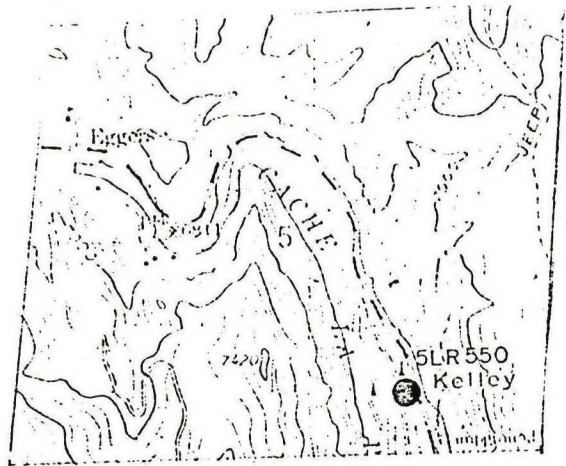
T. 8 N., R. 72 W., Section 5

Big Narrows Quadrangle

7.5' 1962

UTM: zone 13

458775 mE; 5402500 mN



Description

One intact projectile point and a projectile point base fragment, both observed in disturbed contexts at the Kelly Flats Campground, may represent remains of a Late Preceramic occupation.

The Kelly Flats Campground occupies a broad first-level terrace on the east bank of the Cache la Poudre River about 40 kilometers west of the mouth of the Poudre Canyon.

A break between the first and second terrace levels occurs about 120 meters east of the Poudre River, the second terrace lying about 10 meters above the first. At its north and south ends, the second-level terrace is pinched out by sloping terrain and is bounded on the east by State Highway 14. A strip of flat ground between the scrap of the terrace and the south shoulder of Highway 14 appears to represent the main site area.

Numerous vandal pits of various sizes dot the south edge of the second terrace, indicating the area once bore visible evidence of

bi-convex in cross-section. The stem is rather thick with edges tapering symmetrically to a straight base.

The scraper (Figure 3i) is fashioned from a quartzite reduction flake with the boulder end retouched to form a steep convex working edge.

Conclusion

Scrapers of the type observed at 5LR536 occur frequently (but not exclusively) in association with material belonging to Plains-Woodland or related Late Middle Prehistoric or Late Prehistoric components in the Colorado Front Range (Irwin, 1964).

Small corner-notched projectile points are usually attributed to the Late Prehistoric Period in the Front Range region (Morris, 1976).

Considering the site's location and apparent depth of sediments, earlier occupations, not evidenced among the present surface material may be present.

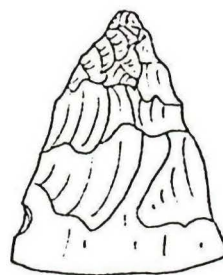
Grey Rock Mountain is a very popular recreational area and during the summer months thousands of hikers and campers visit the site area. It seems likely that some of the people visiting the site will displace or remove archaeological material.



a



b



c



d



e



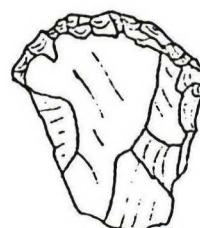
f



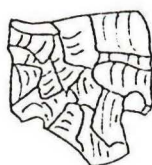
g



h



i



j



k

Figure 3, Flaked stone artifacts.

prehistoric occupation. At the time of recording, there is no surface material on the terrace proper.

Material Culture

The base of a large stemmed projectile point or knife (Figure 3J) was observed in the back dirt of one of the larger pits.

The artifact displays broad diagonal notches, abrupt shoulders, and broad, slightly expanding stem with convex base. The blade is biconvex in cross-section; flaking is direct or indirect percussion.

A smaller tool of similar design (Figure 3k) has been observed among eroded sediments at the toe of the terrace near an abandoned access road. The artifact is 1,025 feet (325.42 meters) north of the northwest corner of the Kelly Flats well house and 5 feet east of the pipeline for water spur No. 1.

The point exhibits broad shallow diagonal notches, a thick expanding stem with straight base and partial remains of a striking platform at the butt of the stem. The broad leaf-shaped blade appears to have been reworked along one edge. The artifact is biconvex in cross-section.

Conclusion

Both artifacts are characteristic of types usually attributed to the late Preceramic Period, or Late Archaic. Both specimens are quite similar to tools from levels III and IV at Spring Gulch, (Kainer, 1975) and lower levels of the Owl Canyon Rock Shelter (Burgess, in preparation), two recently investigated multi-component sites in northeastern Colorado. There are also definite similarities between the Kelly Flats material and artifacts from the upper levels of the Apex component at Magic Mountain and Lodaiska Level D (Irwin and Irwin, 1959, 1964).

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Summary

Six archaeological sites have been discussed in the preceeding text, all warranting immediate evaluation and management recommendations.

The extent of collection activity on these sites prior to investigation may be extreme and the possibility that none of the surface material is in an undisturbed context should not be overlooked.

Diagnostic artifact samples are on the whole quite small, making any conclusions as to possible affinities of these sites extremely tenuous.

All the sites discussed in this report are potentially important, in at least a regional context. These sites represent statistically vital elements in the apparent prehistoric settlement pattern of the Lower Poudre Canyon (Grant, in preparation).

Sites 5LR532-536 and 5LR550 should be considered for nomination for the National Register of Historic Places.